

USA Admits Possible Link between Biological Weapons and Agent Green



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Seattle and Hamburg, 29 August 2000. In an August 22 memorandum, US President Bill Clinton has conceded that the US plan to use microbial agents to eradicate drug crops may have an impact on biological weapons proliferation. This is the first time that US officials have publicly admitted that the use of biological agents like *Fusarium oxysporum* (dubbed "Agent Green") raises arms control concerns.

The Sunshine Project has convincingly argued that *F. oxysporum* and other mycoherbicides are biological weapons. Because of its illicit coca crop, Colombia is on the front line of US biological warfare plans. Other projects on biological agents to kill opium poppy and marijuana are also funded by the US and the British Governments.

The Presidential memo waives several conditions for US assistance to Colombia. In particular, Clinton overruled the US Congress and severed the link between Colombian acceptance of Agent Green and the overall implementation of the US 1.3 billion dollar bilateral assistance package for Plan Colombia.

Clinton states that the US will not use Agent Green until "*a broader national security assessment, including consideration of the potential impact on biological weapons proliferation and terrorism, provides a solid foundation for concluding that the use of this particular drug control tool is in our national interest.*" (from Memorandum of Justification for Presidential Determination 2000-28).

According to the Sunshine Project's Edward Hammond, "*This is an important step forward. While important parts of the US Government stubbornly refuse to withdraw support for Agent Green, President Clinton has eased the bilateral pressure on Colombia and admitted that this may have been a bad idea from the start.*"

Adds Sunshine's Jan Van Aken, "*Agent Green is a biological weapon. It was developed with a hostile purpose, intended to be used in an armed conflict in Colombia. Use of Agent Green threatens to undermine international agreements prohibiting biological weapons. It must be stopped immediately, worldwide.*"

It is important to note that the presidential memorandum does not necessarily signal a change in US policy. "*Pro-fungus parts of the schizophrenic US Government could easily rebound. The memorandum is a window of opportunity. Governments should take fast action and exploit the possibilities for progress before the window closes.*" says the Sunshine Project's Susana Pimiento.

The Sunshine Project is calling on governments and international agencies to take the following steps:

- The United Nations Drug Control Program (UNDCP), which administers the US-funded work in Uzbekistan and is promoting *Fusarium* testing in Colombia, should immediately freeze all of its international projects on crop-killing biological agents and withdraw the contract it is offering Colombia. No government, much less a United Nations

agency, can take risks with bioweapons proliferation. Work cannot resume until the arms control issues have been resolved, a broader range of expert UN agencies have independently evaluated the program, and UNDCP's governing body has fully reviewed the work.

- With aid no longer conditional on acceptance of Agent Green and with the US publicly admitting that it is uncertain about bioweapons links, there is no reason why the Government of Colombia has to proceed with the US-inspired biological eradication idea. Colombia may now heal regional unease with the plan and publicly withdraw from negotiations with UNDCP, halting any planned research on *Fusarium* and other biological agents.
- The US Government must conduct a transparent review of the US Department of Agriculture program that funded and developed *F. oxysporum* and other crop-killing weapons. The USDA worked for more than a decade on projects. A dangerous policy failure has taken place if serious assessment of the treaty compliance and proliferation aspects of this program have not been reviewed until now – after agent identification, work on virulence enhancement, delivery systems, and field testing.
- The current situation offers a remarkable opportunity to strengthen the Biological and Toxic Weapons Convention (BTWC), updating it to reflect new and different political realities and type of conflict prevalent in the post-Cold War era. With the US leadership having conceded there are proliferation concerns raised by the drug war biological agents, during the next Review Conference of the BTWC in 2001, states parties should leap on the opportunity to insure that all crop-killing biological agents, especially those used with hostile intent in an armed conflict, are banned by the convention.

Opposition Increasing In July, the Ecuadorian Government banned the introduction and use of *Fusarium oxysporum*. In an editorial in its August 7th edition titled "Agent Orange and *F. oxysporum*", the Managing Editor of Chemical and Engineering News, the magazine of the American Chemical Society, called for a halt to drug war bioweapon research. Accusing the US of developing "*dubious weapons systems*", the editorial condemns the program, saying, "*There is an unavoidable moral component to scientific research, and development of F. oxysporum as a weapon in the war on drugs or any other war violates it. Scientists should just say no to participating in this research.*"

**For more information, visit the Sunshine Project online at:
<http://www.sunshine-project.org>**

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